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ABSTRACT

This report presents activities of the Family Connection initiative in Georgia, whose aim is systemic change and improvement in child health, child development, family functioning, school performance, and family economic capacity. Section 1, "The National Context," illustrates how Family Connection efforts reflect a national recognition that social services should focus on families and communities, respect family cultural groups, and allow common forms and procedures. Section 2 "The State Context," describes Family Connection as one of several community-based state reform efforts in Georgia guided by the Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families. Section 3, "The Family Connection: Systems Change in Action," outlines the program's expansion from 1991 through 1996. Section 4, "Family Connection Contacts," lists contacts for each county. Section 5, "Counties and Communities: Making Progress Throughout the State," comprises the bulk of the report and describes specific, county-based Family Connection initiatives in two areas: (1) linking families to services, including developing comprehensive school-linked services, pooling resources to reach specific age groups, creating family resource centers, and building on family strengths; and (2) collaborating to achieve results, including moving from planning to implementation, and taking more steps toward Georgia's vision for children and families. The final section compares basic statistics on child poverty rate, child health status, school performance, teenage birth rate, and percent of children in single parent families for Georgia and nationwide. (KDFB)

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Stronger Families and Healthier Children in Georgia

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A Report About The Family Connection

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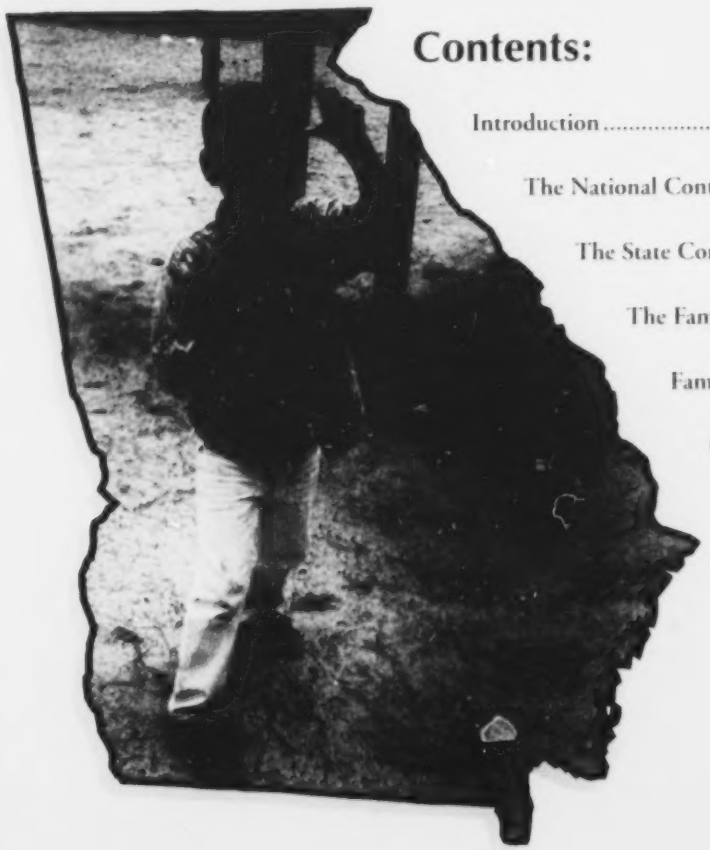
Aiming for Results:

Stronger Families and Healthier Children in Georgia

A Report About The Family Connection



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The Family Connection is a collaborative partnership of the Georgia Departments of Children and Youth Services, Education, Human Resources, Medical Assistance, and the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, as well as the Georgia Academy for Children and Youth Professionals, and Georgia families and communities. For further information contact The Family Connection, Suite 800, 260 Peachtree Street, NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30303, (404)527-7394, FAX (404)527-7443

Introduction

"Georgia's hope is for all Georgia children to grow up to become productive, contributing members of society."

In 1995, Family Connection communities all across Georgia made significant progress toward improving services to strengthen families and meet children's needs. Also during the year, Family Connection communities expanded local plans to reflect Georgia's new framework for improving results.

The new framework, adopted by the Georgia Legislature in 1995, set forth "new ways of doing business." It aims to bring about systemic change and improvements in child health, child development, family functioning, school performance, and family economic capacity.

Georgia's vision is that its children will be healthier, able to start school ready to learn, perform better in school, and have more economically self-sufficient, stable, and nurturing families. Georgia's hope is for all Georgia children to grow up to become productive, contributing members of society.

Since 1991, The Family Connection has pioneered community-based decision-making and family-focused prevention strategies. As collaborative groups have organized, interagency cooperation has begun to replace fragmentation. Representatives of state agencies that focus on children and families, as well as numerous public and private organizations, parents, and individuals, participate on collaborative boards. State agencies involved in The Family Connection include the Department of Children and Youth Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Medical Assistance, and the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget.

Most of the community groups in the Family Connection movement, which was launched in 1991 by Governor Zell Miller with generous support from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, meet monthly to assess progress:

- They assess their county's child and family needs.
- They seek out and listen to consumer and parent perspectives in areas such as health care access and child care availability.
- They plan focus groups and town meetings to incorporate citizens' ideas for local solutions.
- They take action in many pressing areas—such as teenage pregnancy, poor student performance in school, lack of affordable health care, child care, jobs, and housing.
- They pay attention to the needs of the whole family, intervening early to prevent the conditions that lead to poor results.

Georgia's long-standing tradition of "giving and caring," plus the recognition that "helping each other helps ourselves," has enabled this broad-based collaborative movement to emerge and to mature. Examples of recent Family Connection activities across rural and urban Georgia reflect the choices each community has made for itself:

- Family support workers follow up on children referred by nurses in the schools.
- Family resource centers bring together multiple health and human services under one roof.
- Separate coordinating groups consolidate into one—both to improve planning and to streamline services, with the understanding that "turf guarding" doesn't help.

Many Family Connection communities have learned new ways to change government systems—by financing public agency services in creative ways, pooling resources, and sharing staff. Just talking to each other improves interagency relationships.

Other changes reflect the roles that private organizations and volunteers can play.

Telephone hotlines help guide parents to child care and jobs, and printed service directories facilitate referrals. Volunteers sign up to tutor students, and church members help run child health fairs. Students work alongside adults in community clean-up projects, and "awards" nights spotlight the contributions that business leaders, agency representatives, parents, and children have made.

Family Connection communities struggle to offer a full range of options for teenagers and the very young. They seek to prevent developmental harm and to reduce the time, money, and energy spent on repairing damage. They also recognize the needs of parents—for child care, parenting skills, health care, and job training and opportunities.

Early and regular contact with young children and families, plus the provision of family-strengthening services, are two key strategies. The Family Connection encourages communities to think together and work together, across public and private agency lines, and across age groups and generations, to achieve the results they want.

One Georgia county's vision reflects the work of all: "Our vision is for the community of Coffee County to accept ownership of its needs, for agencies to establish partnerships to help empower families, and to raise the standards of humanity in our county."

As Dr. Adrienne Butler of Waycross in Ware County said recently:

"The Family Connection concept is working, and I'll tell you why. Several years ago, local human services agencies in Ware County were barely speaking to each other. But through a long process we began to focus on our children and families—not on our institutions and their guidelines. By sharing human services workers out in the community, and bringing well-trained nurses into the schools, we began to break down barriers between disciplines and systems. Gradually, professionals, organizations, agency caseworkers, parents, and consumers have gotten to know each other better. We can now work together, really listen to each other, and reach out to help children and families in need.

"Just this fall, a 17-year-old girl went to a school-based clinic to ask for a painkiller for an earache.

"Let me take a look," the nurse said.

"At this point the registered nurse, Carol Hall, found a large, swollen inflammation behind the student's left ear. She comforted the student, who had just moved to Waycross with her family, and told her that a medical specialist would be needed to help diagnose the problem. Noting a serious and unusual condition, the nurse arranged for an immediate appointment at the Ware County Family Practice Center—where we quickly set into motion a series of events that led to the student's recovery from a possibly life-threatening case of acute mastoiditis.

"An ear, nose, and throat specialist admitted her to the hospital without delay, despite her lack of health insurance, and she was operated on the next day. A worker stationed in the hospital through the Right from the Start Medicaid program helped her family register for Medicaid coverage, for which they were eligible, and health and human services providers worked together smoothly to help the patient recover. And while her left middle ear was destroyed by a benign growth, resulting in a loss of hearing, we prevented repercussions that could have been much worse if treatment had been delayed any longer.

"My point is that a few years ago a well-trained nurse would not have been working in the schools; our community health center would not have been linked as closely to the schools or to specialists in private practice and to the hospital; and other agency workers would not have been so willing to 'cut red tape' so quickly.

"Building connections and developing patterns of coordination between service providers, community representatives, and residents does lead to improvements in motivation and attitude, and ultimately to systems change. The Family Connection is working."

Jessica McDonald, left, was a new resident of Waycross when she went to the school-based registered nurse, Carol Hall, for pain relief from an earache. (See story at left.)

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The National Context

"We cannot expect to regain our nation's economic health and position of world leadership by neglecting the maintenance and growth of our most essential assets—our people, our children."

Family Connection efforts in Georgia reflect changes in human services systems taking place across the United States. Many studies document the lack of effectiveness of outmoded state and local bureaucratic structures, categorical funding, and inappropriate, uncoordinated services that create barriers—even for the people they are trying to help. Despite America's philanthropic nature and generosity, many public and private social services overlap, contradict each other, and cost more than can be budgeted.

Meanwhile, at a time of major national social policy change, some states and communities have begun to rethink the way they deliver services. They have brought together agencies, institutions, frontline workers, and consumers to examine their operations closely and make improvements. They have found that many of the changes needed are based on plain common sense: (1) focusing on families and communities rather than programs; (2) developing respect for differences among diverse cultural groups; and (3) allowing flexible and common "intake" forms and procedures—so that a parent or child can be enrolled in a program by any frontline worker and not be told to go elsewhere.

Research on "what works" suggests that state and community-based collaborations can bring about change and work most effectively when (1) a full cross-section of the state or community participates; (2) partners believe that working together will help their own programming and contribute to accomplishing their own goals; and (3) community representatives have the willingness to compromise and even bend the rules, until they can be rewritten.

Georgia takes great pride in the fact that this state supports and funds so many collaborative planning and integrated service efforts. As a result, Family Connection groups in 56 counties (out of a total of 159 counties) can take the necessary time to build a community consensus for change and improvement.

In the end, the rationale for making this type of investment can best be understood in economic terms. The nationally respected economist Harold W. Watts puts it this way:

"My concern as an economist has to do with the country's workforce. Unless we, as a society, make the investments that equip our children with basic skills and an ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world, our material living standards will deteriorate, and our self-esteem will evaporate.

"The shortage of human capital among some of our childrearing adults, which is the result of years of neglect, is a root cause of poverty itself because of the limits on these adults' potential work performance and earnings. And the effects of poverty on the children of these adults cannot be mitigated except by vigorous investment in both parents and children.

"We cannot expect to regain our nation's economic health and position of world leadership by neglecting the maintenance and growth of our most essential assets—our people, our children."

The State Context

The Family Connection is one of several community-based reform efforts in Georgia that aim to ensure that children are healthy, able to start school ready to learn, perform better in school, and have more stable and nurturing families. Other reform efforts include the Governor's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program, Healthy Families Georgia, Work First, Children 1st, The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education/Georgia 2000 Partnerships, Head Start, Early Head Start, Georgia Parent Support Network, Georgia Cities in Schools, and CrossRoads, an alternative school program.

A new Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families will oversee these initiatives for the state. The Georgia Legislature authorized the Policy Council in 1995, and members were selected recently to work on an agenda of (1) results accountability; (2) strengthened families through prevention; (3) redirected budget priorities; (4) government responsiveness; and (5) community decision-making.

The approved state plan for children and families, as presented in the report *On Behalf of Our Children: A Framework for Improving Results*, includes objectives that envision bold actions by communities:

- To implement community-based, family-focused, and prevention-oriented service strategies for children and families.
- To focus on mutually agreed-upon results as measures of success.
- To authorize new decision-making structures that have the responsibility and authority needed to make improvements for children and families.
- To eliminate the policy and system barriers that interfere with achieving results.
- To redeploy local, state, and federal funds into the new service strategies.

Family Connection communities have already responded to these Policy Council objectives, and many local groups can demonstrate that change is possible. They find creative ways to identify and reach out to people in need, and they join forces to eliminate costly duplication, close gaps in services, and make program procedures "seamless" for the children and families who need help.

"Georgia cannot afford the staggering human and financial costs associated with our high teenage pregnancy rates and with child abuse and neglect, juvenile crime, low birthweight babies, and poor school performance....

"Family Connection efforts to make education, health, and human services more accessible to needy families have been a springboard for the state's strategic plan to improve the well-being of our children and their families...."

—Governor Zell Miller, 1995
Family Connection Conference
Augusta, Georgia

The Family Connection: Systems Change in Action

Fiscal years 1991-1993 ..... Governor Zell Miller and The Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation joined forces to launch The Family Connection in 14 communities: Atlanta/Fulton, Carrollton City, Coffee, Dawson, Decatur City, Elbert, Emanuel, Hall, Houston, Lowndes, Murray, Muscogee, Richmond, and Ware. Prior to this, the Kirbo Foundation had contributed funds for the Mitchell County Children and Youth, Inc., which became affiliated with The Family Connection in 1991.

Fiscal year 1993-1994 ..... The Georgia General Assembly supported expansion of The Family Connection through the funding of original counties and 15 more. New communities included: Athens/Clarke, Bibb, Gordon, Gwinnett, Jasper, Jenkins, Laurens, Paulding, Rome/Floyd, Spalding, Sumter, Tift, Troup, Walker, and Dalton/Whitfield.

Fiscal year 1994-1995 ..... Twenty-five more counties received funds to organize collaborative bodies and to plan comprehensive, coordinated services and strategies, and previous Family Connection communities received implementation grants. New counties included: Camden, Cobb, Crisp, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Evans, Glynn, Grady, Greene, Haralson, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Lumpkin, Meriwether, Newton, Polk, Randolph, Rockdale, Seminole, Tattnall, Turner, Wilkes, and Worth. Also in 1995, Chatham-Savannah became formally affiliated with The Family Connection, although it has not received Family Connection state funds.

Fiscal year 1995-1996 ..... All existing funded counties received state funds for implementation.

Over time, many other state, federal, local government, and private foundation funding sources have also assisted health-related and other comprehensive program activities in Family Connection sites. For example, between 1992 and 1995, The Pew Charitable Trusts assisted five collaboratives in Atlanta/Fulton, Chatham, DeKalb, Murray, and Ware counties in an effort known as The Children's Initiative. In recent years Family Connection counties have also benefited from four other funded programs: a Department of Children and Youth Services prevention services grant program; a Department of Education and Department of Medical Assistance school-based health grants program; a Morehouse School of Medicine Area Health Education Center integrated health and social services program; and family support program funds derived from federal sources allocated to the Department of Human Resources. Meanwhile, individual communities have sought out and received additional funding for specific local projects, and have forged new partnerships to provide services for children and families.

Family Connection Contacts

Each county or community involved in The Family Connection has developed a multidisciplinary and multiagency group that brings together public and private agencies and parents around the goal of improving the lives of local children and families. The group is sometimes an "umbrella collaborative," and sometimes a committee within another interagency governance structure.

Each type of group stresses comprehensiveness, so that local government and all community agencies and organizations, including churches and community-based nonprofit organizations, can join in the action to improve services and outcomes.

As Governor Miller stated in August 1995 at The Family Connection's annual conference in Augusta, the purpose is community inclusion. "If you don't have the right people around the table," he said, "you must set more places."

Each Family Connection collaborative operates under the name it chooses. County entities and local contacts appear below, along with the page number on which the summary of a county's work appears:

Bibb page 14

Bibb County Family Connection
1178 Jackson Springs Road, Macon, GA 31211
Gigi Rollins (912) 746-7402

Camden page 22

Camden County Family Connection
c/o Camden County Board of Education
P.O. Box 1329, Kingsland, GA 31548
Gary W. Blount (912) 729-5687

Carroll page 28

Carrollton Family Connection
c/o Carrollton City Schools
601 Maple Street, Carrollton, GA 30117
Debra B. Williams (770) 834-1868

Chatham page 28

Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority
316 East Bay Street, Savannah, GA 31401
Gaye Smith (912) 651-6810

Clarke page 29

Athens/Clarke County Family Connection Partnership
850 College Station Road, Athens, GA 30610
Tim Johnson (706) 369-9252

Cobb page 23

Cobb County Family Connection
c/o Cobb County Commission on Children and Youth
P.O. Box 905, Marietta, GA 30061-0905
Judy Pell (770) 528-4089

Coffee page 10

Coffee County Family Connection
150 Trojan Way, Douglas, GA 31533
Annette Nation (912) 383-4340

Crisp page 23

Crisp County Community Council
c/o Crisp County Board of Education
P.O. Box 729, Cordele, GA 31015
Kathy Garwood (912) 271-1054

Dawson page 16

Dawson County Family Connection
P.O. Box 855, Dawsonville, GA 30534
Donna Scobier (706) 265-1981

Decatur page 23

Decatur County Children and Youth Coalition
P.O. Box 1056, Bainbridge, GA 31717
Jim Beck (912) 248-3204

DeKalb page 29

Decatur City Family Connection
c/o Fifth Avenue Elementary School
101 Fifth Avenue, Decatur, GA 30030
Stacey Alston (404) 370-4462

Dougherty page 24

Dougherty County Commission on Children and Health
P.O. Box 505, Albany, GA 31702
Kermit Henderson (912) 430-6327

Early page 12

Early County Family Connection
c/o Early County Board of Education
503 Columbia Rd., Blakely, GA 31723
Deborah Collier (912) 723-8353

Elbert page 15

Elbert County Family Connection
c/o Elbert County High School
600 Jones Street, Elberton, GA 30635
Timothy Wheeler (706) 283-3680

Emanuel page 16

Emanuel County Family Connection
P.O. Drawer 98, Swainsboro, GA 30401
Ray Woods (912) 237-2331

Evans page 24

Evans County Family Connection
c/o Evans County Board of Education
P.O. Box 826, Claxton, GA 30417
Carol L. Jones (912) 739-8014

Floyd page 17

Rome/Floyd Family Connection
c/o Three Rivers Education Foundation
One Riverside Parkway, Rome, GA 30161
Cheryl Legette (706) 295-6085

Fulton page 30

Atlanta/Fulton Family Connection
For further information contact
The Family Connection (404) 527-7394

Glynn page 24

Glynn County Commission on Children and Youth
P.O. Box 1339, Brunswick, GA 31521-1339
Gail Hutchinson (912) 264-7313

Gordon page 19

Gordon County Family Connection
330 South Wall Street, Calhoun, GA 30701
Carol McNeary (706) 602-8510

Grady page 24

Grady County Children and Youth
P.O. Box 300, Cairo, GA 31728
Gail Thaxton (912) 377-3701

Continued

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Greene page 25

Greene County Family Connection
c/o Greene County Department of Family and Children Services
P.O. Box 460, Greensboro, GA 30642
Katy Crumley (706) 453-2365

Gwinnett page 14

Gwinnett County Family Connection
c/o Gwinnett County Coalition for Health and Human Services
240 Oak Street, Lawrenceville, GA 30245
Ellen Gerstein (770) 995-3339

Hall page 11

Hall County Family Connection
c/o Hall County Schools
711 Green Street, Suite 100, Gainesville, GA 30505
Mary Parks (770) 534-1080

Haralson page 25

Haralson Coalition for Children and Youth
c/o Haralson Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 272, Waco, GA 30182
Sue Jones (770) 537-3999

Houston page 14

Community Collaborative for Families and Children
401 Dover Drive, Warner Robins, GA 31088
Carol Ferguson (912) 542-2268

Jackson page 25

Jackson County Family Connection
P.O. Box 515, Commerce, GA 30529
Martha Powell (706) 335-5500

Jasper page 26

Jasper County Family Connection
c/o Jasper County Board of Education
1125-A Fred Smith Street, Monticello, GA 31064
Louise O. Marshall (706) 468-6801

Jefferson page 15

Jefferson County Family Connection
c/o Jefferson County Board of Education
P.O. Box 449, Louisville, GA 30434
Donnie Hodges (912) 625-7626

Jenkins page 10

Jenkins County Family Connection
c/o Jenkins County Board of Education
P.O. Box 660, Millen, GA 30442
Judy Holton (912) 982-6000

Laurens page 11

Dublin-Laurens Family Connection
c/o Laurens County Department of Family and Children Services
P.O. Box 68, Dublin, GA 31040
Art Plowden (912) 275-6533

Liberty page 26

Liberty County Family Connection
c/o Hinesbaw School
5 Shipman Avenue, Hinesville, GA 31313
Crystal Goulden (912) 368-7531

Lowndes page 11

Lowndes County Family Connection
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Jane Osborn (912) 245-2466

Lumpkin page 13

Lumpkin County Family Connection
c/o Lumpkin County Schools
103 Mountain View Drive, Dahlonega, GA 30533
Anita Middleton (706) 864-3611

Meriwether page 26

Meriwether County Family Connection
c/o Meriwether County School System
P.O. Box 70, Greenville, GA 30222
Maggie Bowden (706) 672-4297

Mitchell page 30

Mitchell County Children and Youth, Inc.
P.O. Box 693, Camilla, GA 31730
Jennie Bostick (912) 336-5846

Murray page 17

Murray County Family Circle
P.O. Box 1048, Chatsworth, GA 30705
Tricia Grace (706) 695-8086

Muscogee page 17

Muscogee County Family Connection
c/o Davis Elementary School
P.O. Box 5346, Columbus, GA 31906
Scott Holcomb (706) 649-1192

Newton page 18

Newton County Family Connection
c/o 8 Juices for Children
P.O. Box 1345, Covington, GA 30210
Linda Costley (770) 385-7450

Paulding page 19

Paulding County Family Connection
c/o Matthews Elementary School
335 Academy Drive, Dallas, GA 30132
Jana Stegall (770) 443-1660

Polk page 13

Polk County Council for Children and Families
749 Fletcher Street, Cedartown, GA 30125
Pam Ewers (404) 749-5332

Randolph page 27

Randolph Family Connection
c/o Randolph County Board of Education
1208 Andrew Street, Cuthbert, GA 31740
Samuel A. Williams (912) 732-5179

Richmond page 30

Richmond County Family Connection
P.O. Box 358, Augusta, GA 30903-0358
Roberta McKenzie (706) 724-3827

Rockdale page 18

Rockdale Coalition for Children and Families
P.O. Box 658, Convers, GA 30207
Annette Phillips (770) 760-8714

Seminole page 26

Seminole County Family Connection
c/o Seminole County School System
800 S. Woolfork Street, Donalsonville, GA 31745
Peggy Downing (912) 524-2433

Spalding page 12

Griffin-Spalding Family Connection
P.O. Box 701, Griffin, GA 30224
Eileen Ogletree (770) 412-4080

Sumter page 20

Visions for Sumter
802 Ashby Street, Americus, GA 31709
Susan Martin (912) 928-3499

Tattnall page 27

Tattnall County Family Connection
P.O. Box 788, Reidsville, GA 30453
Barbara Wilkinson (912) 557-6026

Tift page 31

Tift County Commission on Children and Youth
P.O. Box 389, Tifton, GA 31793
Sue Wilson (912) 386-7433

Troup page 13

Troup County Family Connection
P.O. Box 2971, LaGrange, GA 30241
Lagina Fillingim (706) 885-1414

Turner page 16

Turner County Family Connection
238 East College, Ashburn, GA 31714
Jo Wingate (912) 567-9866

Walker page 20

Walker County Family Connection
P.O. Box 606, LaFayette, GA 30728
Vickie P. Duncan (706) 638-6330

Ware page 31

Ware County Family Connection
c/o Ware County Board of Education
P.O. Box 1789, Waycross, GA 31502
Marvene Brooks (912) 283-8656

Whitfield page 21

Dalton-Whitfield Collaboration Council
P.O. Box 1023, Dalton, GA 30722-1023
Betsy Emerson (706) 272-2343

Wilkes page 27

Wilkes County Inter-Agency Coalition
c/o Wilkes County Board of Education
P.O. Box 279, Washington, GA 30673
Marcia P. DeLany (706) 678-4044

Worth page 27

Worth County Community Preservation
504 E. Price Street, Sylvester, GA 31791
Brian Marlowe (912) 776-8650

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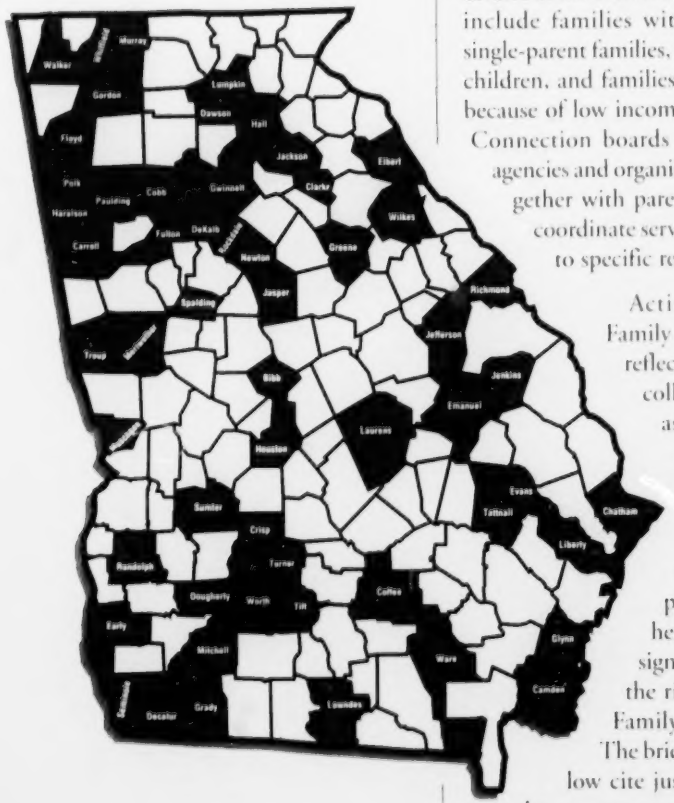
Counties and Communities: Making Progress Throughout the State



Children and families served by The Family Connection in Georgia are as diverse as the communities involved. They include families with young children, single-parent families, teenage parents with children, and families who are vulnerable because of low incomes or illness. Family Connection boards represent multiple agencies and organizations who work together with parents and residents to coordinate services so that they lead to specific results.

Activities within each Family Connection county reflect each community's collaborative planning, assessment of needs, and implementation processes. Many began just one or two years ago. And while each group's plan calls for comprehensive services by design, the themes listed on the right help to describe Family Connection work. The brief summaries that follow cite just a few examples of the many ways each county's Family Connection helps children and families.

- Linking Families to Services
  - Comprehensive School-Linked Services
  - Pooling Resources to Reach Specific Age Groups
  - Creating Family Resource Centers
  - Building on Family Strengths: The Role of Family Support Workers
- Collaborating to Achieve Results
  - Getting Together: Moving from Planning to Implementation
  - Taking More Steps Toward Georgia's Vision for Children and Families

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Linking Families to Services

Comprehensive School-Linked Services

Many Family Connection activities involve close linkages with schools. Schools are where the children are, and schools are often the first place to "co-locate" human services workers who can be more available to the children and families who need them.

Many different kinds of social service personnel work in schools, ranging from nurses and substance abuse counselors to volunteer senior citizens, case managers, and local human services personnel. Working inside or very near the schools helps these frontline workers to see, recognize, and pay attention to student behavior and performance, to train teachers to recognize early signs of difficulty, and to involve parents in devising solutions.

Examples of Family Connection communities that are collaborating across agencies to plan or implement school-based programs include the following:

The Coffee County Family Connection has found that schools are successful catalysts for multi-agency service integration. For example, the Coffee Regional Medical Center funds eight school-based nurses in school clinics for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students. In 1995 these nurses, along with school counselors, served as Medicaid case managers for more than 160 families and conducted 8,901 visits in school settings. Case management services, focusing on high school seniors, proved to be very successful last year. Out of 23 seniors who received intense attention, 22 graduated, even though one year earlier they had been considered "at risk" for dropping out of school because of pregnancy, poverty, grade retention, school absences, or family problems.

"Out of 23 seniors who received intense attention, 22 graduated, even though one year earlier they had been considered 'at risk' for dropping out of school."

—Coffee County

Last January, The Family Connection helped put Fresh Start in place. This is an alternative evening school available to teenage parents who want to stay home with their infant during the day. Since most of these teenagers live at home with their working parents, the parents or grandparents can care for the infants while the student goes to school in the evening. The Family Connection provides parenting workshops for Fresh Start teenagers, and also sponsors parenting classes in a Saturday school known as Project P.O.W.E.R., which aims to help the parents of truant children or those with discipline problems.

In each of these activities The Family Connection works through a larger County Interagency Council to increase the sharing of funding resources, space, clerical staff, equipment, and supplies. Ongoing presentations to civic clubs and churches contribute to community awareness of the county's problems and the Family Connection's concept for community-based action and solutions.

The Jenkins County Family Connection has established itself as a prevention-oriented force for advancing better outcomes for children and families in the county. By initiating programs in the middle and high school, the collaborative has integrated a network of early intervention and education services for students and their families. Two case managers work with parents to include them in a Nurturing Parenting Program and in parenting skills counseling, as well as referring them for other needed services. Another specific goal is to increase the percentage of fathers and male caregivers who are actively involved in their children's lives, whether or not they live with the children.

The Family Connection expands child care availability for teenage parents who are still in high school, and it promotes GED tutoring for non-high school graduates. A primary focus is to give individuals educational and training opportunities, noting that strong support and encouragement from families can provide children and adolescents with the knowledge they need to succeed. Concerning child health, the collaborative plans to increase the numbers of school system "health checks" and, by opening a school health clinic, to detect young

students' minor health problems before they can become more serious.

The Hall County Family Connection has devised several strategies for improving child health, school performance, and family functioning among neighborhood preschool children and students in ten elementary schools and one middle school, and teenagers at risk of school dropout in one high school. High retention rates, low attendance rates, and family poverty characterize the student population in these schools, and The Family Connection brings together many resources to address these problems. Concentrated attention goes to identifying preschool children in need of school-readiness and health assessments, and also to working with teenagers and their families. Improving Hall County's high school graduation rate of 62 percent is one specific goal.

Public and private service delivery partners in Hall have formed a Family Connection Networking Committee to coordinate in-school and community activities. Agencies that "out station" workers at the ten schools include public health, mental health, the Department of Family and Children Services, the Hall County School System, and the Gainesville City Schools. Targeted case management using Medicaid funds has also begun, through which school counselors and social workers can increase direct services to students and their families, and can increase referrals to family support systems.

Family Connection efforts benefit from coordination with many other community projects—such as The Liaison Project, which enables probation workers and school personnel to work together to help students referred to the juvenile justice system, as well as an evening high school, an alternative school, a parenting skills training program, a mobile health unit, and an education program for newly arrived immigrant families. One Family Connection school is 68 percent Hispanic, with families from Mexico and Central and South America.

The Dublin-Laurens County Family Connection has identified family stability and family functioning as priority concerns for 1996. As the group's new plan states, "We see family stability and family functioning as having a ripple effect on all of the goals addressed by the Georgia Policy Council on Families and Children. We define a functioning family as one whose basic needs are met (such as food, clothing, shelter, health, and safety), whose members communicate with one another, whose members have mutual respect for one another and are emotionally healthy, and whose roles and responsibilities for each family member are clear."

To move toward better family functioning in Laurens County, The Family Connection expects to coordinate many services for families, reduce the number of abuse and neglect incidents, and improve parents' basic living skills so they can meet their families' basic needs. Three different age groups of children will receive case management services: children enrolled in the prekindergarten program in Dublin City and Laurens County Schools; children in CrossRoads grades 6-12, and referred children from kindergarten age through the fifth grade in the Dublin City and Laurens County schools.

Having just completed a year of case management work with a small number of families, the Dublin-Laurens County Family Connection points to one lesson they have learned: "Continual, ongoing evaluation of ourselves is critical to affecting real changes in the way we do business—in our attitudes and in our actions."

The Lowndes County Family Connection has integrated many services to help at-risk students and their families affiliated with Lowndes Middle School. Since the beginning of the 1991- 1992 school year, entering sixth graders and their families have received comprehensive services that have expanded every year. School-based clinics have been set up in most of the schools, and mental health counselors work with students at the middle and high schools. Individual counseling and groups have helped the students learn to communicate,

High school students in Richmond County-Augusta won a Family Connection award in 1995 for conflict resolution "peer mediation" work in middle and elementary schools.

"Our community's economic, social, and educational status depends on citizens taking responsibility and ownership for their actions."

—Tenge County

get along with peers and adults, and take advantage of trips outside the county. As a result of tutoring, individual attention, mediation of family crises, and community involvement, fewer students than before have been retained at grade level.

Training and education programs enhance the economic skills of parents. "One of our mothers never finished school," reports the Family Connection coordinator Jane Osborn. "But we encouraged her and helped her with appliance repair and transportation, and she was able to finish her GED and enter Valdosta Technical School where she became a top-ranked computer/accounting graduate. She now attends Valdosta State University with work/study and academic scholarships."

The effects of community involvement are beginning to be seen in all schools in the county. Many local agencies participate in Family Connection interventions: the founding group, mainly the local officials of state agencies and Valdosta State University, has expanded to include, among others, representatives of the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Valdosta Junior Service League, and the County Board of Commissioners. A family caseworker works with younger children and their families at the Clyattville Elementary School, and one counselor works out of the Behavioral Services Center. A family outreach worker, partly supported by "cash match" funds from the Department of Family and Children Services, links consumers with child-serving agencies and schools, and also creates opportunities for parent training and teenage health risk prevention.

The East Griffin Elementary School and the surrounding neighborhoods are the focus of work at the Griffin-Spalding Family Connection. Members of this collaborative have been meeting since 1994, when over 30 practitioners and consumers from health, education, and social services agencies gathered for a discussion that led to a long process of information gathering, workshops, and questionnaires directed toward the community and toward families.

Examples of services now being delivered, to respond to the needs found in the community, include in-school health screenings and treatment (provided by the Family Connection nurse); a mobile health unit (provided in collaboration with the Spalding Regional Hospital); family workshops on the treatment and prevention of health problems (taught through the County Cooperative Extension Service and the Red Cross); after-school tutoring and literacy classes for adults (taught through the Griffin Technical Institute); parenting skills classes taught by an instructor from the Spalding County Department of Family and Children Services; counseling for parents with preschool-age children to help them prepare the toddlers for prekindergarten; in-home consultations with a family support coordinator, particularly aimed toward families where there is a history of abuse and neglect of children; and assistance with child care and other service referrals.

The Family Connection works in conjunction with a Community Collaboration Council that meets monthly and has initiated written guidelines and agreements among partners.

Pooling Resources to Reach Specific Age Groups

Several Family Connection collaboratives have selected specific age groups around which to pool community resources, coordinate service strategies, and introduce interventions. Some communities focus on young children, hoping to prevent problems as the children move into middle school and high school. Others target teenagers, to keep them in school or in an alternative education program, or to offer dropouts flexible evening and weekend opportunities to catch up and learn the basic academic and jobs skills they need.

Examples of Georgia counties focusing new or renewed plans and strategies on young children and their families include the following:

The Early County Family Connection, with the goal of preventing later pregnancies among teenagers, is planning prevention strategies for about 45 students in grades 3, 4, and 5, and their families. Through contact with these children at a young age, the collaborative expects to assess the needs of each family to help them develop their own resources and avoid problems.

Special training will help elementary school staff identify risk factors, work effectively with a specific group of children, and make needed referrals for services. School nurses will conduct health screenings; volunteer tutors will help students who rank poorly on standardized math and reading tests; and volunteer mentors will

encourage improved school attendance and achievement and help develop and nurture self-esteem and goal-setting among the young students. GED training, parenting assistance, and counseling will be available to older siblings and parents in the home.

Early County strategies are based on disturbing statistics. Early childbearing (to women under 18) rose to a rate of 84 per 1000 children under 18 in 1994, compared to the state's rate of 54, with 43 percent of the county's children under 18 living in poverty, compared to the state's rate of 21 percent.

A year of planning by the Lumpkin County Family Connection has led this group to devise elementary school prevention strategies. "Although the problems of children dropping out of school or having encounters with the law seem to crop up in middle and high school," the planners reported, "in Lumpkin County we feel that a program of prevention best begins in the elementary schools. By directing our attention to younger children, we can provide counseling for young families, parenting classes, family problem-solving activities, health screenings, and a coordinated system for getting services to each family member who needs them."

A significant one-day planning event helped the collaborative confirm the level of services that exist in the county. Some 40 organizations sponsored information booths in a 1995 Family Connection Day, enabling many agencies to join The Family Connection. A mailing list now totals 63 groups who want to stay involved. WDGR radio promoted the event for weeks in advance, and scheduled entertainment brought in children and parents alike. As one principal said later, "I had no idea that this day would be this big. I can really see now how all-encompassing Family Connection can be."

The Polk County Council for Children and Families, which is the "umbrella" collaborative begun with Family Connection planning funds, is beginning to build the supply of young child care services for parents who are working or enrolling in academic or training programs. In assessing county needs that relate to children and families, the group found through focus groups and survey questions that affordable child care services were seriously inadequate for parents who wanted to work or study as a step toward increasing family incomes.

By developing the Polk Child Care Assistance Initiative, the new council has set aside funds that pay up to half of a parent's child care costs. The Georgia Child Care Council has also offered scholarship funds for infants and toddlers. A family support worker coordinates this program and oversees child care provider training, a resource library for parents and caregivers, and mental health, and Medicaid outreach services to all licensed or registered child care sites in the county.

The Troup County Family Connection has developed a two-generation approach to reach young teenage parents and their children from birth to three years old. In this prevention approach, the collaborative seeks to help infants and children who may have possible developmental delays or problems that call for immediate attention. Through home visiting and an enriched parenting curriculum, trained family service coordinators develop support networks for the teenage parents and link them to tutors, GED classes, and affordable child care. Among the goals are to promote the family unit, to build parental strengths through family-oriented activities, and to create mentoring relationships with business professionals.

Troup County's Family Connection progresses alongside and in collaboration with an expansion of the county's pre-kindergarten program. As the Family Connection coordinator Lagina Fillingim says: "We have learned that merging forces through joint decision-making and governance is making a significant difference in our community. Our community's economic, social, and educational status depends on citizens taking responsibility and ownership for their actions."

In Polk County, information gathered in the community led to a Family Connection concentration on increasing child care services and improving their quality.

"Success Program students have stayed in school and performed academic work on a higher level than they would have without the coordinated services approach."

—Bibb County

Examples of Georgia Family Connection counties working with young teenagers and their families include the following:

The Bibb County Family Connection chose Appling Middle School in Macon for a "Success Program" around which the collaborative's many agencies could learn to pool resources and staff to deliver coordinated services to 7th graders performing two years below grade level. According to Department of Education data, this group of 74 students entering middle school had less than a 1 percent chance, statistically, of graduating from high school. The strategy was to work intensively with these young teenagers and their families to improve school performance and prevent later dropout.

Many local city and county agencies contribute to this school-based prevention effort, meanwhile progressing toward collaboration in other areas. Concerning the Success Program, agencies such as the Macon Housing Authority, the Department of Labor, and the Lions Club have accepted referrals from the Family Connection family service worker and a mental health counselor; and agencies such as the Department of Children and Youth Services and the Bibb County Sheriff Department have presented in-school sessions on conflict resolution, substance abuse prevention, and truancy issues. Twelve Mercer University tutors helped 48 students last year, contributing to student accomplishments.

Results of an analysis of current 7th graders and those 8th graders who would have been eligible for the program one year earlier (had it been available) indicate that Success Program students have stayed in school and performed academic work on a higher level than they would have without the coordinated services approach.

An analysis entitled *Human Services Needs in Gwinnett County, Georgia*, was published in 1991, revealing high poverty rates in many Gwinnett neighborhoods and high levels of domestic violence, child abuse, and even hunger. It described a "false image of affluence" in the county, and spearheaded a multitude of community-based approaches to improving human services. Today The Family Connection acts as part of the larger Gwinnett Coalition for Health and Human Services, which originally published the report.

The Family Connection's primary strategy is to develop, manage, and evaluate service delivery prototypes that "co-locate" multiagency staff members and seek to provide comprehensive services to children and families in need. These prototypes are characterized by geographic accessibility to services, case management and referral linkages, and interagency pooled resources and staff. Two are in operation: the School-Based Resource Center at Rockbridge Elementary School, Lilburn, and the Neighborhood-Based Resource Center at Beaver Ruin Apartments in Norcross.

Out of a total number of 165 children and 67 families assisted in 1995, case managers referred 71 students for emergency financial assistance, medical follow-ups, child care, job needs, or credit, academic, nutritional, or behavior-related counseling. Concerning health needs, health screenings revealed that 52 out of 128 children needed dental care, with hearing and vision problems noted in 28 children. Referrals were made to help these children receive medical and dental care.

Parental involvement has been essential. In one Rockbridge orientation session, a parent suggested that many local residents needed adult education classes. To quantify this need, the parent helped to develop and administer a neighborhood survey, revealing that many parents wanted help running a small business. Personnel at the Small Business Development Center at Gwinnett Tech then offered individual consultations and classes concerning marketing, legal issues, and recordkeeping.

In Houston County, the Family Connection collaborative recently changed its name to the Community Collaborative for Families and Children. Three priorities are to improve family functioning among the families of children enrolled in elementary and middle schools; to expand nursing, mental health, and paraprofessional services in schools through health clinics, health checks, and individual child and family counseling; and to improve at-risk students' school attendance, academic performance, and behavior.

Redeployment of staff from three state agencies, including one "cash match" Department of Family and Children Services position, allows interagency teams to work with families in a culturally sensitive manner, and to involve the families in planning

and decision-making. During 1995 two family service coordinators worked intensely with 85 families, serving 193 children and 103 other family members. Some of the parents have now returned to school themselves or obtained jobs, and some of the children have improved dramatically in school performance. Concerning health care, two team nurses provided health checks in six schools for 425 children, provided 995 "episodic" health treatments required, made 942 referrals to other medical providers, and conducted 1,025 parent/teacher conferences.

How to continue expanding health services for "working poor" families has been a dilemma, however, because many children have no health insurance and are not eligible for Medicaid-reimbursable services. Of 261 health checks provided by The Family Connection in two schools, 111 children, or 42 percent, had never had a health check, and 117 children, or 45 percent, were up to seven years overdue for health checks.

Many other community-based services have been made available through the collaborative's efforts to bring institutions together to pool resources. For example, teacher training, summer camps for training peer mediators, and an active parent group have been funded through the Department of Children and Youth Services. The Board of Education provides half of two case managers' salaries and also invests into the collaborative any Medicaid funds obtained from school-based case management services.

The Jefferson County Interagency Council, which serves as the Family Connection collaborative, has been concerned about the health and developmental status of the county's children for many years. The county has high rates of child poverty, child and infant deaths, births to teenagers, and low birthweight. In a 1995 needs assessment survey, 906 residents contributed their knowledge and experience to identifying five top needs in the county: job training and placement, teenage pregnancy prevention, drug abuse prevention, expansion of school-based nurses; and increased after-school tutoring.

Building on its community collaboration experience around an extensive prekindergarten and family health needs program, Jefferson County has developed a Family Connection "At-Risk Intervention Team" to work with students in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. This age group was chosen because of the complexities of the students' problems and the impact that might be made on their adult lives if they received culturally relevant counseling, tutoring, parenting education, and family support.

Some of these teenagers already have babies and toddlers, and planners believed that a multigenerational approach to the families was the best strategy to help them. (Many of the students' infants and toddlers are being cared for at home by the teenagers' parents or grandparents.) An alternative school called Hi-Tech is another way this county responds to serious, documented problems concerning its youth. In 1992-1993, 14 percent of the students in grades 9-12 did not move on to the next grade level.

The Family Connection intervention team consists of a coordinator, a trained paraprofessional who will visit student homes to work with the families to develop comprehensive service plans, a health assistant to facilitate support groups and health education, and a trained mental health counselor. A parenting curriculum that can be applied to any setting—at home, school, or at a community site—helps the students learn appropriate skills.

Examples of Family Connection counties that have chosen to work with a broad range of age groups include the following:

The Elbert County Family Connection recently broadened its services to at-risk families who have children from prekindergarten age to middle-school and high-school age. Shared hiring and funding of frontline workers is one example of useful coordination: multifunded workers include a caseworker, a jobs developer, mental health counselors, youth health educators, and the Family Connection director.

Jointly sponsored programs reflect coordinated strategies: the Board of Education sponsors a parenting

Health screenings and immunizations, as in Paulding County, are among the prevention services integrated through Family Connection efforts.

"We build on family strengths, not weaknesses."

—Dawson County

class for high school students who are pregnant or are parents; and in 1995 a Chamber of Commerce Mentor Program enlisted volunteers to work with 159 elementary and middle-school students. A "Study Buddy" tutoring program functions well in an elementary school; and teachers have helped students improve their performances on academic tests and in social interactions with other students. In 1995 more than 100 families received emotional and mental health assistance, and more than 200 children attended a summer program coordinated by several agencies.

The Turner County Collaborative Council plans to implement Family Connection prevention strategies with three age groups: teenage mothers who have dropped out of regular school classes; young males 10-16; and fourth and fifth graders identified by school counselors as having poor self-esteem.

The teenage mother program will incorporate academic requirements, life and parenting skills training, and education provided by a school nurse that will emphasize infant growth and development, help young mothers maintain immunization schedules, and stress the nutrition and safety precautions that should be taken for infants' well-being. The mentoring program for young males will include activities with Boys Clubs and other organizations, and education about personal responsibilities, choices, and parenting. Counselors will refer at-risk children to family service case managers, who will work directly with families to help foster confidence among the young students.

Creating Family Resource Centers

The development and staffing of family resource centers has been a useful strategy for some Family Connection counties. Brief descriptions of the work going on in these counties include the following:

The Dawson County Family Connection has brought together resources from many agencies to place a family service center in a primary/elementary school complex. Here students and their families benefit from health screenings, home visits, and personal counseling. Parents volunteer their time at the resource center to help with vision and hearing testing, and they also serve on the Family Connection's steering committee. Increases in the number of contacts with students demonstrate the program's progress: not counting medication dispersals, 2,337 service contacts with children took place in 1994, and 4,770 in 1995.

Family support techniques make these services meaningful. "We build on family strengths, not weaknesses," the Family Connection coordinator Donna Scohier stresses. "We want to develop a sense of support and stability in the families' lives."

Collaborating partners in this endeavor include education and public health representatives as well as the Department of Family and Children Services and the Department of Child and Youth Services, plus the Ninth District Opportunity Community Action Agency, the Chamber of Commerce, the County Cooperative Extension Service, the County Commissioner, law enforcement and juvenile justice representatives, and students and parents.

The Emanuel County Family Connection funnels most of its state Family Connection funds to the staffing of eight family service cen- ters in eight schools, to provide better transportation services for children and families, to assist families with children enrolled in CrossRoads and with parents enrolled in the employment-oriented PEACH program, and to assist the DARE drug education program for fifth-grade students in which police officers volunteer.

In this county, the LPN/Parent Liaison Program identifies the health problems of at-risk children and families, and nurses assist with tuberculosis, strep throat, mumps, and other illnesses. In 1995, 51,840 contacts were made through this program, which coordinates services with the Health Department's RN Services Program. The Emanuel County Child Abuse Prevention Center, known as "The Sunshine House," is now a Regional Child Advocacy Center funded by the Georgia General Assembly.

Family Connection services provided to one particular family, described in a recent report, demonstrates the positive outcomes of collaboration:

"In one corner of Emanuel County, known as Stillmore, a family resides that receives various services through the Emanuel County Family Connection process. The family consists of a father, mother, and two children. Homestead and parent

aide services are provided through the Department of Family and Children Services, and one child participates in the Elementary Therapeutic Afterschool program. Both children receive health services through the LPN/Parent Liaison Program at school, and both receive school health checks conducted by the Family Connection registered nurse. One child has received a psychological evaluation and counseling services through the Sunshine House. Because of the success this family has realized through The Family Connection, the mother attended the 1995 Family Connection Conference in Augusta, and she is now a member of the collaborative's Steering Committee as a 'consumer' parent."

The Family Connection Center in Rome, Georgia, provides a neighborhood hub for many services that have been integrated through the Rome/Floyd County Family Connection. Among these services in 1995 were Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop activities, a summer enrichment program for children 5-14 years old, an art enrichment program for elementary school students, and a tutoring and self-esteem building program for 41 students grades 1-6 to improve their skills in reading, mathematics, and English. Tutors volunteered from the neighborhood, Rome High School, and Berry College. Agencies developed partnerships and shared programs frequently during the year: GED students were referred to an adult literacy program at Coosa Valley Technical Institute, and after-school programs, mental health and support groups were combined.

This organization's year-end report for 1995 summarized both the difficulties and the good outcomes of collaboration. "The most painful, yet critical lesson we have learned about community-based services is that collaboration is a slow and tedious process if done correctly.

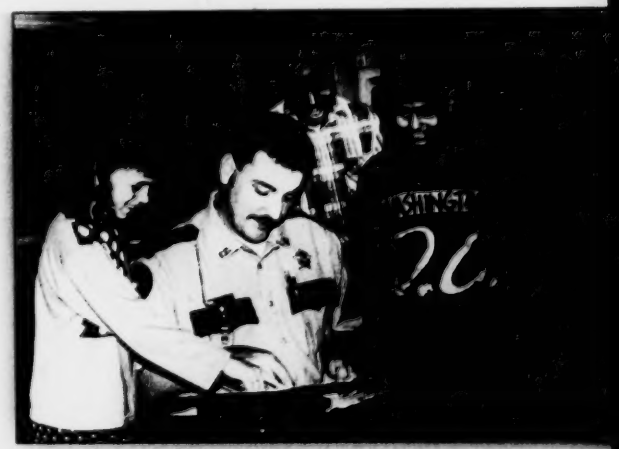
"When consumers are involved in the decision-making process, consensus is difficult to achieve. Issues that may seem small to agency personnel are not small to consumers. Also, we learned that building trust among school administrators, families, children, and agency workers was sometimes more important than our formal agenda. If we had not earned the credibility of all the stakeholders, the Family Connection Center would not thrive. The positive outcome for this year has been a willingness by consumers to cooperate on a much higher level."

The Murray County Family Circle is the collaborative that acts as a Family Connection entity. Here frontline service agency workers and the parents of children in the school system develop service priorities through an interagency committee. Decisions have been made based on both needs assessment surveys and family well-being surveys. As a result, Family Connection recently opened a family resource center where eight agencies coordinate their services to help children and families.

The array of services available at the family resource center reflect the needs that were found in the community: child and adolescent counseling; child care resource and referral; family crisis interventions; teenage health care; GED classes; marital counseling and classes; legal services; family outreach; parenting classes; Right from the Start Medicaid eligibility; and English-as-a-second-language classes. The collaborative aims to reach all children in the county attending prekindergarten through 12th grade.

The Muscogee County Family Connection currently concentrates integrated services on children in Davis Elementary School and a new site, Downtown Elementary School. At Davis Elementary, a suite of offices serves as a family resource center that brings together health and mental health workers, outreach workers from the Department of Family and Children Services, prekindergarten, and Right from the Start Medicaid services, and the parenting coordinator from the elementary school. A registered nurse manages the Health Support Clinic, which focuses on health screenings and immunizations, as well as other health-related services for all children and their families in the neighborhoods served.

Parent "empowerment" classes take place during the day and in the



In Emanuel County, as in other counties, The Family Connection coordinates programs in schools, such as DARE, through which police officers educate students about drugs.

"In Rockdale County, belief in interagency collaboration was there, but we needed an impetus like Family Connection to get us going."

evenings, with adult education and GED classes that also teach computer basics. These activities help to increase parent and community involvement in the schools, which are located near public housing units. Plans for 1996 involve creating a family resource center separate from but near the Davis school.

The Newton County Family Connection has chosen the Washington Street neighborhood in which to begin to concentrate coordinated services and a collaborative approach to planning and implementation. In this neighborhood, state and local agencies provide services at a new community center.

Many organizations have committed themselves to work on problems identified by the community: a summer lunch program for residents (Murray Church); neighborhood-based substance abuse education (mental health); weekly health screenings (Newton General Hospital and the Newton County Board of Health); a family service coordinator to assess the eligibility of toddlers for school readiness assistance (Newton School System); the development of youth clubs and recreational activities (Newton County Cooperative Extension Service), and parenting classes aimed at reducing child abuse and neglect (Department of Family and Children Services). The Newton County School System is also cooperating to provide vocational education, GED training, and job training and placement for low-income youths.

The Washington Street Community Center is located in the center of an urban neighborhood in downtown Covington, and while Newton County as a whole ranks 146th out of 159 Georgia counties for high school graduation, the targeted neighborhood has a lower ranking. The Family Connection's goal is to bring together multiple health, education, and counseling services to help local students stay in school and out of trouble. Family Connection community outreach workers will be instrumental in this endeavor.

The Rockdale County Family Connection adopted a dual focus during its year-long planning period. First, a community assessment by the Citizens Commission for Children and Youth produced findings consistent with the need for systems change. Many service organizations were operating effectively in the county, but they were fragmented and did not coordinate with each other. Unnecessary duplication resulted in repetitive questioning of families as they tried to apply for the various services they required and were eligible for. Finally, most of the help available in the county was found to be "curative" and "after the fact," not prevention-oriented.

As Annette Phillips reports, "In Rockdale County, belief in interagency collaboration was there, but we needed an impetus like Family Connection to get us going. The service providers themselves, plus community leaders and parents, recognized that a new countywide governance structure was needed to help us plan ahead to achieve better outcomes for children and families."

Rockdale has also identified one neighborhood, the Lakeview Estates Community, in which family-oriented, prevention services can make a difference in the lives of the children and families. Two organizations already working in this area, the Lakeview Community Action Committee and Healing Hands, Inc., joined the collaborative to help plan services.

Despite the short amount of time devoted to these efforts, much has been accomplished by the many organizations now working together in the Lakeview neighborhood and Rockdale County: the family resource center has been refurbished and is operating; community clean-up days have taken place; funds for an alternative school have been received; an adult literacy teacher has been hired; an old basketball court has been resurfaced; land to build a soccer field has been donated; plans are underway to start Girl Scout and Boy Scout activities; a day care center is planned; parent workshops have begun; a tutor has been funded to visit homes to prepare 2–4-year-olds for entering school; "how to" classes take place every other week to help parents learn new skills; and a local community newsletter has been launched.

Building on Family Strengths: The Role of Family Support Workers

Several Family Connection communities have incorporated "family support" as a major strategy for delivering quality services to children and families in need. Family support has developed nationally as a prevention process whereby trained community workers help increase the stability of families by increasing parental competence and by restoring families' abilities to solve their own problems.

Examples of how family support practices differ from "traditional" social work include: (1) their focus on families as a whole, rather than just the individual in trouble; (2) their flexibility in responding to family and community needs, rather than simply offering specific services dictated by eligibility; (3) their availability and cultural sensitivity, by offering drop-in counseling rather than strict office hours; and (4) their openness to visiting consumer's homes and meeting families "where they are."

Family support workers are typically committed to helping families achieve the goals they have set for themselves, and they involve parents as partners in planning ways to reach these goals.

Trained family support workers have been key to "early outreach" and quality services in the following Family Connection counties:

The Gordon County Family Connection has adopted a family support strategy that seeks to help whole families with young graduates of prekindergarten and Head Start programs who have been identified by their teachers or referred from current kindergartens. Working on the concept of preventing later problems, four family support advocates work with families in four settings: in a small resource center at the Family Connection office, at one city elementary and five county elementary schools, in family homes, and in community service agencies.

In a program called Follow Through, these advocates first get to know the family at home, and the child at school, before jointly developing a list of family strengths, needs, and future plans. These preparations then lead to a "participation agreement" that reflects the families' needs and the community's capacities to help.

Some 295 family members participated in Follow Through in 1995, based on 133 initial referrals. About 38 percent of the early referrals came from classroom teachers. Concerning child protection, Family Connection has identified 19 children in five families who were able to avoid foster care placements as a direct result of the family's participation in Follow Through.

A Community Information Line coordinator is another member of the Family Connection team, which also includes a director to oversee staff and the pooling of resources, to organize training and support groups, and to move the collaborative forward. As the director Carol McNeary stated recently, "In monthly meetings attended regularly by about 25 residents and agency representatives, we have advanced our community's goals and have developed a formal method of communication between social service agencies to identify gaps and duplication of resources, and to keep the greater community informed about social problems in the county."

In Lumpkin County a large community fair in 1995, with exhibit booths for agencies and entertainment for children, boosted knowledge about The Family Connection as a resource for children and families.

Based on surveys and community focus groups, services most needed in Gordon County include financial assistance with utility bills and high costs of deposits; affordable and available child care and assistance in enrolling for child care subsidies; affordable housing and emergency shelters; community-based services in the underserved rural area of Fairmount; better transportation across the county; more teenage pregnancy prevention education and recreation programs; drug and alcohol support groups; and violence prevention strategies.

The Paulding Family Connection has relied on focus groups and surveys to develop countywide plans that feature family support workers to help respond to residents' needs. For example, in 1995 the cost of health care was identified as a major problem by 77 percent of the

respondents. Some 92 percent of the households in Paulding have children, but there is only one pediatrician in the county. Many families in the district of the Dallas Elementary School have no health insurance, nor are they eligible for Medicaid.

A new Paulding County Child Health Services Task Force is examining trends in the county that affect health care, including managed care plans, population growth, and changes in Medicaid. One effort concentrates on identifying at-risk infants at birth, through coordination with the Children 1st system, and reaching out to offer family support to new mothers delivering babies in neighboring county hospitals.

Concerning child and youth development opportunities, several 1995 activities—such as the production of a resource directory, a Child Abuse Awareness Month, and a children's summer program—were the direct results of community survey findings. Many families in Paulding County had cited isolation, lack of transportation, few opportunities to participate in affordable family activities, few recreational or cultural activities for children and youth, and a lack of affordable child care services.

The key to responding to many of these concerns in Paulding has been to hire and train (or redeploy from other agencies) family support workers who can work directly with families in many locations and can develop relationships with school nurses and personnel in other human services agencies. Frontline workers serve on all Family Connection committees, and cross-training of staff is stressed. Funds from several sources have added a school nurse for health screenings, as well as resources to support the work of a child care specialist and a Childhood Care and Education Task Force.

Paulding has revealed the strength of its collaborative by getting both public and private agencies to work together to plan, raise and pool funds, and implement community actions across many fronts.

Sumter County's Visions for Sumter is an "umbrella" collaborative that encompasses prekindergarten and CrossRoads representatives as well as The Family Connection. Last year Sumter established its first family resource center in the Eastview Apartments community where agency staff members represent the Sumter County School System, Middle Flint Behavioral Health Care, and the Sumter County Department of Family and Children Services. A second family resource center, staffed by two family support workers, recently opened in another neighborhood at the former Habitat for Humanity Headquarters.

Strategies that characterize Family Connection relationships with families in these neighborhoods include parent education, literacy tutoring for adults, academic tutoring for children, recreation, child care provider training, teenage and pre-teen support groups, job skills workshops, and "mothers morning out" programs.

One goal is to have every child in each neighborhood receive appropriate immunizations at birth and have health screenings regularly throughout early childhood, using a Right from the Start Medicaid outreach worker to help families enroll for benefits. Other goals are to reduce incidents of child abuse, reduce exposure to illegal drug activities among children, increase school readiness, and increase awareness and support of the parents' role as a child's first teacher.

Sumter County also screens all mothers who give birth at the Sumter Regional Hospital, partly to determine the family's level of risk for child abuse and to offer family support workers to identified parents. The county is also beginning a partnership with the police to coordinate community watch programs, offering parent education concerning child developmental stages, funding better recreation activities with the help of civic organizations, training center-based and family day care workers, and initiating other types of counseling support and training opportunities that help families stay together.

The Walker County Family Connection has brought together numerous public and private agencies to focus on integrating health care and human services in all county elementary and middle schools. Currently 9 out of 11 elementary schools have parent centers on site, partially managed by parents themselves who have been trained in parenting/nurturing skills or who can provide information on nutrition and health. Guest speakers regularly present information on these topics and on child development and interactive programs for parents to help their children learn to read and study.

The family centers, as well as the resource center at the Alternative Education Center,

contain materials such as videos, books, games, and magazines to help parents learn about social acceptance, anger control, impulsive behavior among children, and new approaches to parent/child interactions.

Two public health nurses work in the three middle schools and the Alternative Education Center, conducting health screenings, handling emergencies, teaching classes, and counseling students and staff. A new mobile health unit, planned for 1996, will be available to both county and city schools and to communities with high-risk children and families.

Meanwhile, with an increase in pre-kindergarten students throughout the county (from 40 to 80 students in the public schools and one classroom in Flintstone Day Care), family support work with the families of these young children has also increased, and health screenings and preventive child development services are available to families who request them.

Membership in the Family Connection collaborative has increased from 14 original agency representatives to more than 30. Present members represent the Walker County Schools, Chickamauga City Schools, Mental Health, the Department of Children and Youth Services, the Department of Family and Children Services, the Health Department, Coca Cola, and representatives from private business, local and state law enforcement, consumers, local churches, the Crisis Center, and the County Commissioner's Office. In some instances students have attended collaborative board meetings to contribute their perspectives to countywide planning efforts.

The Dalton-Whitfield Collaboration Council, which operates as a Family Connection collaborative of 125 representatives from the business and public service sectors as well as interested consumers, is implementing a Family Support Practice Model in six elementary schools. This prototype builds partnerships with families and neighborhoods and relies on school-based public health nurses, the redeployment of human services agency personnel, and interagency staffing to identify the children and families who would welcome intensive prevention counseling and programs. In addition to providing in-school health assessments and treatments, the nurses work closely with a family support team to follow up on family problems, to build parental skills through a Nurturing Program, and to help overcome barriers that may be affecting children's academic performance or behavior.

Family support professionals in Whitfield are funded partially by the Department of Family and Children Services, by Healthy Families, by School Outreach funds, and through targeted case management Medicaid funds returned to the collaborative. Trained volunteer "natural helpers" in neighborhoods help link at-risk families to sources of community assistance. An interagency staffing component consists of collaborative planning with at-risk families to support them and improve outcomes. Efforts to reach children and families in need include hospital assessments at birth, prekindergarten and Head Start referrals, and the in-school nurse approach.

The Family Connection goal is to improve the health and developmental status of all children in Whitfield County from birth to adulthood, but especially those between birth and twelve.

Business leaders play significant roles as mentors to children in many Family Connection communities, as in Carrollton.

Collaborating to Achieve Results

"Community-based collaboration... lies at the heart of The Family Connection."

Community-based collaboration—among state agencies, local government, nonprofit organizations, and citizens—lies at the heart of The Family Connection.

The rationale for collaboration has to do with family-centered comprehensive services that get to "root" issues rather than just address symptoms, and better communications between the people and the groups that aim to help strengthen families raising children. Agencies and organizations willing to plan together, for the sake of their communities, find renewed energy for their work. As the Athens/Clarke Family Connection reports, "Persistence pays off."

Getting Together: Moving from Planning to Implementation

Some of the communities involved in The Family Connection have just begun to "get together," which is the first step a community must take before it can move ahead as a force for change. The volume *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services*, by A.I. Melaville and M. J. Blank, describes the stages in community collaboration:

- The process begins when a small group decides to act together to address the shortcomings in the current child and family service delivery system—a problem that their own institutions or organization cannot solve independently.
- Organizers become partners and involve the right people, a diverse group with clout and commitment.
- The group makes a commitment to collaborate by agreeing on a unifying theme, establishing shared leadership, setting ground rules, and securing financial resources for the collaborative's planning efforts.
- During each stage, partners reflect on what has happened and celebrate success.

Some of the Family Connection communities just getting started were described in the previous sections. Others include the following:

Camden County, the fastest growing community in the state according to the U.S. Census Bureau, was once an isolated rural area. Today, because of the presence of the naval submarine base at Kings Bay, this large county is undergoing a steady increase in transient families who need medical care, mental health services, transportation, and numerous other educational and human services. The numbers of children experiencing physical and emotional abuse have been rising, with grade retention rates and foster-home placements on the increase. As in most Georgia counties, while "typical" human services agencies exist within the county to work with families, a lack of coordination can affect the delivery of these services to children and families.

To help respond to these issues, the **Camden County Family Connection** plans to provide families of children attending Camden Middle School with integrated services through a coordinator, two family service case managers, and a nurse. Using common intake forms, program staff will identify gaps in the levels or quality of the services these families receive, and closer relationships with state and local agencies will be sought.

Two family resource centers are proposed, and strategies for improved school performance by the children will include peer tutoring and expanded accessibility of resources (such as library materials), increased attendance at school, and reliance on "in-school suspensions" to assure completion of school tasks and the development of "individualized education processes" for each of the students involved in the program.

Cobb County has brought together community service providers, business leaders, and concerned citizens to form the **Cobb County Family Connection Policy Council**. Current priorities rest on a year-long county needs assessment and on data gathered in a family well-being survey conducted by consumer leaders with local families.

Because of the significant problems found in some areas of the county, such as high teenage pregnancy and kindergarten retention rates, work will be focused in several at-risk neighborhoods: Fort Hill Homes, Lyman Homes, and Roosevelt Circle in Marietta City, and Norsouth Corporation Communities, Ivywood Park, and Rosewood Park in outlying Cobb County. In each of these areas Family Connection goals are to promote positive conditions: to improve child health, education awareness, and economic enhancement, and empower families to develop their skills to engage in positive activities and relationships.

Specifically, the collaborative partners will integrate service delivery to these areas from among several public and private agencies, such as the Board of Health, Cobb Community Parents in Action, the Board of Education, the Department of Family and Children Services, the Cobb County Community Services Board, Families First, and the YWCA. Family advocates will work directly with families in each area to increase their awareness of available services.

The improvement of family functioning was selected in 1995 as the goal for future strategies in Crisp County. Here the **Crisp County Community Council** serves as the Family Connection planning and implementation agent. Using The Family Connection's broad-based planning methods, this group has expanded since its 1992 founding to bring together other initiatives such as the prekindergarten program and CrossRoads, as well as programs emerging out of federal funding.

The planning process has involved intensive meetings, workshops, focus group meetings for over 200 participants, and questionnaires from more than 500 consumers, service providers, and community residents. Middle-school students and families are the primary target population, with high school students as a second focus.

To deal with an increasing number of young teenage pregnancies, program strategies will concentrate on prevention, intervention, and family support. Three state agencies will redeploy workers to the county's middle school, and funding will be sought to initiate an after-school program aimed at preventing pregnancies through counseling and intensive family support. Classes in the high school will address the needs of teenagers who are already pregnant.

Mentoring and parenting education will help ensure that the teenagers stay in school before and after giving birth, that the parents receive the family health care, academic tutoring, and personal therapy that they need to raise the child well and postpone a second pregnancy.

The Decatur County Children and Youth Coalition has relied on a citizens' survey and focus groups to identify two areas of public housing as neighborhoods in which to redeploy agency staff and link coordinated, integrated services with all public and private agencies in the county concerned about children and families. The first site for pooling expertise and sources of income will be the King-West Apartments in West Bainbridge.

Area health department nurses will facilitate immunizations and early health screenings; and the Department of Children and Youth Services will provide a probation officer to handle mediations and new cases. The Board of Education will provide counselors and instructors for afternoon and evening classes, as well as technical support for a computer lab for after-school tutoring. The Department of Family and Children Services will help fund a family support worker to assist families with day-to-day needs and developing their plans for the future.

"Training for staff and for new collaborative members is our first priority, as well as getting committed services coordinated," said the collaborative's president, Jim Beck. "We have also begun to explore new funding sources through

The Family Connection helps to link families to services such as Healthy Families at Crisp Regional Hospital, which provides home visiting and training for young parents.

"In reality, the community awareness and assessment process served to get our entire community excited about and invested in really doing something for the children and families of Haralson County."

Medicaid targeted case management andby joint billing health care services through he local hospital. Information systems also need to be established, as well as evaluations of how all the programs in the complex are working together and how services can be extended to other areas of the county."

The Dougherty County Commission on Children and Youth, originally formed in 1989, began in 1992 to respond to a needs assessment report, *Dougherty County Youth At Risk: A Profile of Problems and Possible Steps to Address Problems*. Community volunteers and agency representatives initiated meetings to discuss the report's findings and decide how to proceed. A resource center for children and families was explored, and in July 1994 just as the collaborative received Family Connection planning funds, two events occurred: the City of Albany became an applicant for federal Enterprise Zone funds, and the community was hit by an unprecedented natural disaster, the Alberto Flood. A total of 7,548 structures in Albany/Dougherty County were destroyed or greatly damaged, most of them residential dwellings in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. In 1995 a tornado hit the same area, causing renewed damage.

As the new Family Connection director reports, "Flood recovery is expected to take years, and social issues are in the forefront. We are ripe with community-based initiatives, and competition for projected funds and resource opportunities for grassroots efforts now exist where few existed before. Real collaboration is the challenge." Meanwhile, a new Family Connection survey will take stock of agencies serving children and families; a parent center has been planned; and the 1992 youth risk factors database is being updated to identify trends in the prevalence and distribution of problems.

The Evans County Family Connection is just getting started. Here the job has been to combine several existing collaboratives into one umbrella organization—soon to be named—to reduce the number of interagency meetings and ensure an efficient, coordinated approach to strengthened children and families and better outcomes.

This county's planning process has relied on the participation of the parents of at-risk children, and these children and their siblings are now the focus of comprehensive services. A Family Connection coordinator, recently hired, is partly funded through the "cash match" option of the Department of Family and Children Services. The Evans County Board of Education provides space, and many other agencies are contributing services as this community pulls together to face its most serious concerns: school performance and family functioning.

Glynn County has a history of collaboration around child/family issues, and the integration of The Family Connection with the established Glynn County Commission on Children and Youth was an essential part of the 1994 planning process. As a result, the planning committee included many private and public service agencies, such as United Way and the Coastal Regional Development Center.

Family Connection work will concentrate on a group of four-year-olds and their families who live primarily in northern Brunswick. Service components now being initiated at the St. David's Family Center include family financial assessments through the Department of Family and Children Services, health screenings, parenting classes, mental health counseling, extended-day and extended-year school-linked program activities, and referrals to other community services through the efforts of teachers, part-time staff from cooperating human services agencies, and the health department.

Other components of programs planned include a network of volunteers to help transport patients; coordination with perinatal case managers to ensure prenatal and postpartum services for teenage mothers and their families; a mapping of child care resources and local providers; the use of "street teams" to increase neighborhood supervision; and mentoring programs for juvenile offenders.

In Grady County, after a year of community planning and assessment of needs in 1994 stimulated by The Family Connection and the Kirbo Foundation, a collaborative group known as the Grady County Children and Youth was established. The group's goal is to develop a case management approach to helping children and families (1) obtain health-related and other human services; (2) participate in parenting classes, and (3) take advantage of an after-school tutoring, counseling, and

education program. Schools refer children for these services, after which a family services coordinator visits the child's home and begins to help the parents assess family needs. At this point a partnership with the family begins, with the family's strengths forming the basis of the relationship.

The Grady County Umbrella Council, which is the central mechanism for community-based assessment and planning, consists of members from many human service agencies, such as education, health, welfare, schools, and Head Start, as well as local businesses. These representatives meet regularly to link service reform efforts across all sectors of the community.

The Greene County Family Connection has begun its work by compiling a comprehensive resource directory to help collaboration members refer consumers to each other, and monthly Partnership After-Hours sessions are helping partners get to know each other. A multicounty teenage pregnancy task force is getting organized, and a youth apprenticeship program in the high school provides students with job skills and experience. A worker from the Department of Family and Children Services has been outstationed to the health department to help local families. Family Connection has also helped to coordinate activities such as the drug awareness programs DARE and Drug Free Schools; has coordinated after-school activities and a mentoring program for elementary school students; and has developed a day and evening adult literacy program. The new collaborative now seeks to bring more consumers and private sector partners into the planning and implementation process.

In Haralson County cross-agency planners have merged the Family Connection collaborative within one major body, the Haralson Coalition for Children and Youth. As the planners' first report stated, "For the past year we have been involved exclusively in the planning process, which included organization, community awareness, needs assessment, and collaboration. All agree that the shared-responsibility approach for planning has solidified and strengthened the collaborative effort in this community—and enhanced feelings of ownership and commitment."

"In reality, the community awareness and assessment process served to get our entire community excited about and invested in really doing something for the children and families of Haralson County. We enter this next phase with the realization that the job has just begun, but also with the confidence that it can be done. To a large degree this confidence was built during the planning phase."

Community awareness activities in Haralson have gathered in the many perspectives of organizations and individuals. Focus groups representing all segments of the community met to suggest and select priorities for children and families.

The Jackson County Family Connection works through the Human Resources Council, created in 1990 to pursue many countywide goals, some related to four groups: young elementary school children, particularly graduates of prekindergarten who have been identified as needing special services; middle-school students who require intensive tutoring and mentoring to keep up with school work and maintain grade level; teenagers who have either had children already or are vulnerable to early parenthood; and parents of elementary school students, to help ensure that they are positive influences on their children.

Concerning The Family Connection, two part-time nurses and one full-time nurse handle case management in the middle and high schools of three school systems to educate pregnant teenagers, help them obtain prenatal care, and enroll them in parenting courses. Males and females in the Commerce Middle School (grades 6-8) experience a specific curriculum, "Postponing Sexual Involvement," conducted by trained high school students.

These pilot programs involve a blending of county government resources with state resources, and the collaborative reaches out to private organizations and businesses as well. As the county

When the Jasper County Family Connection held its open house in May 1995, members of the collaborative attending included private sector partners and representatives of state agencies involved in local plans and programs.

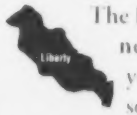
"Helping one family member indirectly helps all members."

—Seminole County

Family Connection plan states, "The agencies and people of this community are very committed to the efforts necessary to ensure success. The county government will provide one-fourth of the salaries for the part-time nurses, and the Northeast Georgia Health District is offering fiscal management, linkages with Medicaid funding, and educational resources and materials for the nurses. Other partners providing financial and personnel resources include the Department of Family and Children Services, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Board of Education.

The Jasper County Family Connection is developing integrated services around children aged 5 to 14. A community assessment noted that families who needed help were precise about the lack of supervised activities for children in the afternoons; about the need for better transportation in this large, rural area; and about inadequate housing and job market concerns.

Staff members include a coordinator, a school nurse, and mental health workers scheduled to begin shortly. The County Cooperative Extension Service provides an after-school 4-H learning and activity program; a parenting support group is in progress; and an after-school student program for elementary school students may soon expand to middle and high schools. A community volunteer service provides transportation for families unable to drive themselves to medical appointments and tutoring. Public presentations for collaborative members and civic organizations about the Family Connection "concept" take place routinely, based on the realization that community collaboration is complex and takes time to accomplish.



The Liberty County Family Connection began its planning year by conducting a needs assessment survey addressed to both consumers of human services and to the providers. The findings have helped this interagency collaborative decide how to integrate services in ways that can have the best effects on children and families.

When parents and residents were asked how the present system of community services should be changed, their responses included the following: "more understanding by caseworkers;" "assistance in finding jobs for single mothers;" "improved legal rights representation;" "agency representatives located at each school;" and "better housing with affordable rates."

Providers' responses included the following: "families are confused about what services they need and what services are available;" "some parents fail to admit they need help because they have too much pride;" "there are no translators available;" and "there are too many strict policies that create barriers for caseworkers."

The interagency collaborative is now developing integrated services that will lead to early contact with all children through outreach and co-located services; provide access through streamlined intake of families in need; expand child care availability and parent education; and improve health care access and family support services.

The Meriwether County Interagency Council, founded in the late 1970s, is the collaborative through which The Family Connection has begun to target several areas of need. In 1995 the council divided into teams to collect sociodemographic data and human services' provider information and to organize focus groups and Town Hall meetings. Focus groups took place on topics such as education, crime prevention, poverty, economics, health, family values, and recreation. Town Hall meetings took place in Woodbury, Greenville, Luthersville, and Manchester. Through this process two interrelated issues—juvenile delinquency and teenage parenting— emerged as priorities for the health and well-being of the community.

The collaborative chose a prevention prototype for action: an elementary school-based family support model to be concentrated at the Woodbury Elementary School. Soon two "cash match" staff members (half funded by the Department of Family and Children Services) will develop mentoring relationships with the families of kindergarten-age and first-grade children to help identify needs and prevent future problems. The current Board of Education prekindergarten program coordinator will provide ongoing guidance, program support, and administrative support for these new family support workers. The goal is for case management services to reach up to 80 families in 1996.

In Seminole County, community assessments have taken place with the assistance of the Kirbo Foundation and technical help from the Southwest

Georgia Community Health Institute. As a result, the **Seminole County Children and Youth** has been established as a Family Connection collaborative. Strategies just beginning to emerge include case management for families, improved child development and school performance through after-school tutoring and counseling; and parenting classes designed to provide parents with the understanding and techniques to deal with conflict, to recognize child development problems, and to know when and how to seek assistance.

Case management has been chosen as a way to reach and develop close relationships with families because of a conviction that all family members are affected by the circumstances of each member. Helping one family member indirectly helps all members.

The Randolph County Family Connection's first meeting brought together 12 public and private agency representatives, and over the next few months the group conducted a "community needs" questionnaire and sponsored focus groups with parents, students, and local civic groups. They agreed to work in three areas: (1) to decrease the number of low birthweight births by reaching out to inform pregnant teenagers about the importance of prenatal care and to help them obtain the care; (2) to improve school performance through mentoring/tutoring programs, summer school, and intensive counseling; and (3) to improve family economic capacities through family support services and by increasing vocational and career training and job placement referrals.

As one member of this collaborative said recently, "The concept of The Family Connection is new and at times hard to understand, and I know we could not have gotten through this planning process without technical assistance. People are used to thinking about their own projects and programs, not about the interrelationships among them and the overall goals we must work together to achieve."

The Tattnall County Family Connection will work in three elementary schools in Collins, Glennsville, and Reidsville to coordinate multiagency services that will help both students and their families. Two family service specialists, one partly funded through a "cash match" position available through the Department of Family and Children Services, and another partly supported through state mental health funds, will soon offer counseling that stresses self-esteem, planning for the future, and high school or GED completion. Retired teachers have begun to help tutor young students to increase their testing scores in reading and math, and parenting classes feature speakers from many county agencies.

The Wilkes County Inter-Agency Coalition is focusing its first year as a Family Connection entity by enabling selected families and children to work toward independence and an enhanced quality of life. Implementation will include a multiyear plan that includes goals of improved school performance, child health, and family functioning.

The plan is to provide resources and the support services needed to 80 families who have children in grades 3-12 who are at risk of poor school performance or academic failure. Families to be reached include those whose children need remedial reading and math tutoring or who have been referred to staff members from several agencies who will work as a team with the Family Connection director. A computerized information system is expected to assist, over time, in facilitating a single point of service entry for consumers and a shared information system among agencies.

Children in Sumter County learn about careers, such as in medicine, through CareerKids, a program coordinated through the Georgia Department of Labor, the Americus Employee Committee, and Visions for Sumter.

The Worth County Community Preservation began in 1991, bringing together a 17-member board that includes the Worth County Department of Family and Children Services, the Superintendent of Worth County Schools, the Worth County Administrator, the Worth County Public Health Director, the Department of Children and Youth Services Regional Director, the Mental Health Regional Director, private sector

"The Carroll County Department of Family and Children Services has noted a decrease in child abuse incidents since The Family Connection began its family-oriented school-based services with families."

representatives, consumers, teachers, agency staff, and a judge.

After assembling statistical information about the status of children and families in the county, the collaborative conducted 12 focus groups for consumers and service providers. A three-year plan resulted, in which child health needs will be stressed the first year, family economic capacity the second year, and improved school performance the third. Even so, multidisciplinary services and outreach activities have begun, using the services of a community school family coordinator, a school nurse, and a community nurse. A Teen Pregnancy Task Force has initiated family health information sessions for fifth graders and activities for other age groups that include life skills training, parenting classes, and child health and development.

Taking More Steps Toward Georgia's Vision for Children and Families

Some Family Connection collaboratives have been in operation for two to four years. Examples of these groups are the following:

Carrollton Family Connection, which has concentrated its work to date within the city of Carrollton, focuses on prevention and early intervention services primarily among children 0–12, although it also serves all at-risk children 0–21 and their families. In an elementary school with a population of 1,800 students, Family Connection family support workers coordinate family-oriented activities along with prekindergarten family service coordinators. Carrollton Family Connection also shares training opportunities and responsibilities with the Department of Family and Children Services, the schools, mental health and health departments, and the Department of Children and Youth Services.

Strategies include redeploying staff to accessible sites such as in the schools, the emergency shelter, and the Maple Street Education Center. The city police department works closely with fifth graders through the DARE drug education program, and a new staff member from the Department of Children and Youth Services is carrying out a program for siblings of juveniles involved in the court system. The Carroll County Department of Family and Children Services has noted a decrease in child abuse incidents since The Family Connection began its school-based services with families.

Parent-child consultations and in-home visiting by counselors promote early skill-building among toddlers and introduce remediation strategies when necessary—with the goal of preventing grade retention later. In-school nursing services, and linking children with either Medicaid health providers or other primary care providers, improves the physical and mental health status of students. A Children's Summit held in Carrollton in late 1995 attracted many business sponsors and community leaders, educators, health care providers, civic groups, state agencies, and many interested residents. The day-long meeting led to renewed commitment among collaborative partners, who are now exploring countywide service strategies.

The Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority is a Family Connection community by virtue of its collaborative methods and its vision for children and families, not because it has received Family Connection state funding. This multifunded organization began in 1987 to focus attention on children's needs, particularly children growing up in poor neighborhoods, and it has spearheaded collaboration among concerned citizens, youth service providers, elected officials, and other community leaders.

Youth Futures serves as a foundation for policy decisions related to the public and private services that can improve the lives of children and young people. Among the strategies employed are the Neighborhood Family Resource Center, where resources and services are co-located; school-based services in middle school, high school, and alternative school settings; a Healthy Start initiative focusing on infant mortality rate reduction; a Family-to-Family Project that seeks out-of-home placement reduction; a drug use prevention program for adolescents called Project Uhuru, and the Youth Service Corps, which offers education enrichment and job training for young adults.

The Youth Futures Authority has been a leader in outcomes-based planning and coordination, and its annual Children's Profile has helped to galvanize local public will

to improve the indicators that reveal how poorly some children are faring. Some of the findings in the 1994 report, for example, point the way to more effective prevention services:

- Infant mortality rates for Chatham County show more fluctuation than those for the rest of the state, moving from a low of 11.7 percent in 1990 to a high of 16.6 percent in 1992, and to 14 percent in 1993.
- Birth rates for young women aged 15-17 have increased.

By assessing basic statistics such as these on an annual basis, Chatham County and the City of Savannah can see where improvements are occurring, over time, and where service strategies must be redesigned. These types of outcomes measurements may become possible in other Family Connection counties as they move their efforts toward results accountability.

Many collaboratives have developed over time in Athens/Clarke County. Some three dozen groups focus on human services issues. Many are issue-specific, however, and none are as inclusive and comprehensive as the Athens/Clarke County Family Connection Partnership, which now encompasses several other collaboratives and has emerged as a major force for change. This group has used state Family Connection funding as a catalyst for forward-looking strategies that have the support of the city/county government structure, as well as most private and public agencies that serve children and families, as well as support of numerous residents and citizens' organizations.

Examples of the types of projects moving toward improved results include an electronic common application for human services, a "reconfiguring" of many early childhood prevention programs into an integrated service delivery program, cost-sharing with the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Clarke County Department of Family and Children Services, targeted case management for families in need, and a concentrated effort to keep each collaborative partner and the general public informed.

Lessons that this expanding group of people and agencies have learned over time, and which might apply to other communities, include the following observations:

- Everyone has something to offer– agency directors, frontline workers, consumers, and residents. Working together itself brings about increased understanding and improvement, as well as ideas, energy, knowledge, and strength.
- Persistence pays off. Genuine collaboration requires understanding others' information as well as communicating one's own.
- Some people and organizations are unwilling to collaborate. This is a difficult lesson to accept.
- Collaboration does work! All of us working together are smarter, stronger, more resourceful, and more effective than all of us working apart.

The Decatur City Family Connection has applied targeted case management for consumers successfully. A family support provider functions as a liaison between families and the community, and between consumers and agencies. Some 196 contacts took place over eight months in 1995, involving home visits with families, student conferences in the school, telephone assistance, and parents visiting the school for counseling. These contacts led to 119 referrals to agencies involved in the collaborative, including the Department of Family and Children Services, the Department of Housing, Social Security, mental health representatives, and community ministries.

Family Connection activities in Gwinnett County include outdoor excursions to introduce children to nature.

A recent evaluation of lessons learned from this collaborative's first three years of operation revealed several points:

- A successful way to accomplish accountability to the community is to enable parents to meet regularly to discuss issues and concerns.
- Agency contact with families can be frequent and informal if agency services are located in school settings. Comprehensive school-based

"Begin services early in a child's life to affect behavior in the teenage years."

—Mitchell County

strategies can reach scores of children and families who might not otherwise be noticed or helped.

- Parents should be given leadership roles in developing and implementing results-driven programs for children and families.

Decatur City Family Connection works closely with the DeKalb Initiative for Children and Families, which also encourages systems change and child/family service integration throughout DeKalb County.

During several years of operation the **Atlanta/Fulton Family Connection** expanded its service strategies from a few elementary schools to all children from prekindergarten to age 20. The collaborative emphasized the use of family liaison counselors as family advocates, and both school-based nurses and nurses from the Fulton County Public Health Department provided health screenings for children. Delinquency, substance abuse prevention, and school dropout prevention programs were developed, and over time the collaborative built a substantial case management Medicaid reimbursement system. As a part of The Children's Initiative, the collaborative worked with The Carter Center, The Atlanta Project, the Federal Executive Board, and various state agencies to successfully pilot the Georgia Common Access Application.

Representatives of the Atlanta/Fulton Family Connection recently reviewed informally why the governance structure set up in earlier years led to insurmountable problems in 1995, leading to a reduction in staff and a dissolution of the collaborative—hopefully temporarily. Lessons learned from an analysis of earlier processes might reveal situations that other counties can avoid. The difficulties of working in a large urban area with many jurisdictions and diverse political climates made it difficult for the collaborative to maintain the momentum of cooperation that had begun in 1991.

Mitchell County Children and Youth, Inc., which began in 1990 with the help of the Kirbo Foundation, serves as this county's Family Connection collaborative. This organization has based its approach on a community survey that identified teenage drug and alcohol abuse as the most important problems among youth in the county, followed by teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and delinquency.

To address these issues, 65 representatives of social agencies and the community work together to plan ways to improve the situation, based on several principles:

- Begin services early in a child's life to affect behavior in the teenage years.
- Select carefully the best intervention methods to achieve the greatest impact with limited funding.
- Offer a series of programs and outreach approaches to the community to reach the greatest range of clients.
- Provide comprehensive services to the family as the client.
- Provide a mixture of intensive programs (many programs to a small number of clients), and extensive programs (few services to many clients).

Mitchell County activities revolve around a school health check program funded primarily through Medicaid billing; prenatal services provided by the county's health department; case management services to assist families with emotional and educational problems; a child care center and a prekindergarten program; and tutoring students at risk of grade retention.

Family services coordinators pay close attention to the needs of parents. In 1995 several parents attended a two-week course in Camilla, conducted by the Thomas Technical Institute, about job hunting, budgeting, motivation and confidence-building, and how to dress and interview for a job.

The Richmond County Family Connection is a broad-based collaborative that concentrates on integrating prevention services in a downtown Augusta neighborhood and South Augusta/Richmond County. Services for children and families are offered both in the community and in the schools. Recent accomplishments include successful after-school and summer programs; increased immunizations and health screenings and the implementation of a dental prevention program; increased numbers of families served through the prekindergarten program, which enables more children to enter school with the requisite skills; a decrease in the number of students needing remediation or failing in school; and improvements in self-esteem among students.

The number of community partners for the collaborative has expanded to 32, and the number of individuals serving as advisors has expanded to 15. Parents are continually involved in planning.

Concerning financing, the collaborative has implemented financing strategies such as shared "cash match" positions through the Department of Family and Children Services, as well as ongoing negotiations to redeploy agency staff effectively. Funds earned through health screenings have been reinvested in The Family Connection. A new computerized health information system enables many new partners to participate, and the cross-training of staff has increased.

Staff members from several agencies have agreed to assist the collaborative with evaluation; these organizations include the East Central Health District, Community Mental Health of East Central Georgia, the Richmond County Board of Education, and the Medical College of Georgia.

In Tift County, the Family Connection collaborative is the 60-member Tift County Commission on Children and Youth. This commission has a track record of community planning about child/youth issues dating back to 1990. It is the umbrella organization for numerous initiatives, and has been instrumental in developing common intake forms and placement procedures for all prekindergarten children, including Head Start and new private providers.

A family resource center in Tift County was established in 1993. A children's room and a health clinic are essential components of many family support activities. Registered nurses at the family resource center and at an elementary school help families who have difficulty getting to the county health department, and seven case managers from agencies in the collaborative link low-income and migrant families to health services, employment, and educational opportunities. Other activities include parenting classes and monthly parent support groups.

The concept of prevention has influenced the planning process in Tift. One example is the Task Force on the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy, which sponsored a public education campaign to increase community awareness. The task force also purchased two "Baby Think It Over" dolls for students' use in the classroom, small groups, or home settings. The dolls are programmed to simulate an infant's crying and frequent needs, day and night, and have been successful components of pregnancy prevention and education programs in other states.

The Ware County Family Connection, which recently began a process of integration with other child/family collaboratives in the county, was one of the original Family Connection sites in 1991. Two main components characterize The Family Connection in Ware, which has merged with the local Children's Initiative: (1) a preschool center known as DAFFODIL, which serves developmentally delayed and special-needs children from birth to five years of age; and (2) school-based health clinics in 11 schools, which include a staff of public health nurses, mental health and substance abuse counselors, a vocational rehabilitation counselor, and a home extension service worker.

Through this type of multidisciplinary team approach and involvement of front-line workers in planning and evaluation, Ware County has identified and helped many at-risk children and families have been over time. Records show that kindergarten retention rates have dropped, and school dropouts due to pregnancy have decreased. Ware County Family Connection is working to ensure that all components of its program become self-sustaining over time. Ware is also initiating a streamlined intake process among the county's human service agencies, and is developing a common information system that will provide better data for management, planning, evaluation, and budgeting.

Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority focuses services on many age groups, among them preschool-age children and their families in downtown Savannah.

Georgia Statistics Speak for Themselves

"The time has come for Georgia to act decisively—to demand and achieve better results for its children."

Basic statistics about the well-being of children and families in Georgia help to explain why Family Connection communities have to work so hard. Georgia children are poor, relative to the children in many other states, but fortunately state and local leaders are demonstrating their concern and commitment to improving the lives of Georgia children and families.

Many Family Connection counties have recorded statistics even "worse" than the indicators listed on the right, taken from the *Kids Count Data Book* published in 1995 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Family Connection collaboratives intend to change this situation, working toward progress in the five domains targeted by the Georgia Legislature: child health, child development, family functioning, school performance, and family economic capacity. The time has come for Georgia to act decisively—to demand and achieve better results for its children.

Comparing Georgia to the United States

	GEORGIA	U.S.
POVERTY RATE FOR CHILDREN 0-18	23.9%	20.6%
CHILD HEALTH STATUS:		
Percentage low birthweight babies	8.5%	7.1%
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births	10.3	8.5
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE:		
Percentage 4th grade students scoring below basic reading level	47.0%	43.0%
Percentage 4th grade students scoring below basic mathematics level	45.0%	41.0%
Percentage of adults aged 25 and older with high school diplomas*	74.7%	80.2%
BIRTH RATE FOR UNMARRIED TEENAGERS AGED 15-19, PER 1,000	53.9	42.5
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES	28.8%	25.3%

* *This information is for 1993; the other comparable statistics are for 1992.*

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